

Cabell Sweeney (left) and Susan Peterson prepare items for firing. Their Cabell's Pottery has grown into a multimillion-dollar operation.

# Team spirit fired up

## Dream takes shape as school-logo ceramics business prospers

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Cabell Sweeney was just being nice.

The Roswell woman was using her talent for ceramic work to make some gifts for friends. Someone saw the UGA-tagged knickknacks and offered to pay her to make a few more for her Auburn gift shop.

Now, Sweeney runs a multimillion-dollar operation that makes licensed NCAA team tableware with designs for 65 different colleges, and she will begin selling NFL-licensed gifts in April.

"It's amazing how it has all grown so fast," Sweeney said.

A little more than six years ago, Sweeney was teaching elementary school and sneaking into the crawl space under her home at night to fetch still-hot ceramic pieces from a pair of kilns.

In a matter of three years, the college line of Cabell's Designs, the company Sweeney co-founded in 2003 with business partner Susan



Serving pitchers are among the firm's licensed tableware designs for collegiate and pro teams.

Peterson, became so popular that they couldn't keep up with demand working from their studio and warehouse.

Orders for kiln-fired plates, cookie jars, pitchers, mugs and wine glasses decorated with colors and emblems from schools like UGA, Florida, Georgia Tech, Alabama and Auburn had the pair scrambling to keep up.

"We were making 400 pieces a month, and more around wedding and Christmas time," said Peterson, a Johns Creek resident. "It was very labor-intensive, and it wasn't conducive

to family."

There were nights when the company had staff working almost around the clock to fill orders, Peterson said.

Their products are mass-produced in China and distributed nationwide by Birmingham-based Magnolia Lane Inc., and the company is projected to make \$5 million this year.

"It's really weird walking into a store and seeing our stuff," Peterson said. "But since we don't do distribution anymore, we don't know where our products go."

Sweeney and Peterson are able to focus more of their time on designing and marketing their product rather than on production and distribution.

This is what allowed them to throw their hat into the pro football market, and what is enabling them to devote more time to their ultimate dream for the company.

"Our dream was to dive back into this community," Peterson said.

The pair spend time mentoring teens in the nonprofit Young Life program. And Sweeney is proud to say that her business is enabling her to be nice again, but on a grander scale, by devoting some of her profits to that and other programs.

"We used to cry and pray that we'd make payroll," Sweeney recalled. "Now we get to give back to our community."